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Retaliation Also Mentioned

Desire for Reagan Defeat Behind Action, Experts Say

By ROBERT C. TOTH, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—The Kremlin's decision to stay away from the Olympics represents a deliberate effort to damage President Reagan's reelection prospects, coupled with a desire to retaliate against the United States for boycotting the 1980 Games in Moscow four years ago, U.S. experts on the Soviet Union said Tuesday.

And the overwhelming consensus among specialists in the State Department and in the U.S. intelligence community is that the Soviet announcement is not a bluff. One news report of an equivocal comment by a Soviet diplomat raised hopes briefly but it was soon denied by the diplomat himself.

"There is virtually nil chance of them reversing" the decision, one aide to Reagan said in summing up the U.S. government view.

None of the government experts accepted the Soviet assertion that concern over the security of its athletes was the primary reason for its action. Soviet fear of defections by its athletes, however, and a desire to avoid worldwide televised coverage of demonstrations against the Soviet Union, may have affected the move marginally, the U.S. specialists said.

George Kennan, the most experienced Sovietologist in the United States, suggested that Reagan's attacks on the Soviets during his Peking visit last week was a major

factor in the boycott decision. The Chinese censored some of Reagan's remarks, but the Soviets were affronted at being criticized by the U.S. President in a third country, Kennan said.

The Soviet decision did not catch most specialists completely by surprise because Moscow some weeks ago issued a statement saying its athletes would not boycott the Olympics—even now the Kremlin refuses to use the word *boycott*—but might not attend them. But there also were hints that the decision announced Tuesday was a last-minute one. The latest edition of a Soviet English-language magazine, for example, features Soviet Olympic athletes.

U.S. officials insisted that the White House went more than halfway to accommodate Soviet demands regarding the Olympics. They denied that the Reagan Administration, with its hard-line, anti-communist views, may have been cavalier or insensitive in its handling of Olympic issues and thus might have given the Soviets cause for the de facto boycott.

Because Reagan is a Californian and this is an election year, the White House clearly wanted the Olympics to come off without a hitch, Administration officials said. In fact, according to two highly knowledgeable officials, the White House was more accommodating to the Soviets on some Olympic issues than was recommended by the State Department—ostensibly the agency that most desires good relations with Moscow.

Indeed, Washington rejected only one Soviet request, Administration officials said: It refused to accredit as the Soviet Olympic attache in Los Angeles an individual whom U.S. intelligence identified as a KGB secret police agent.

The United States told the Soviets last December—months before the individual was officially proposed as attache—that he would be rejected, so the Soviet move was seen as a provocation. "Putting forward the name of a known KGB recruiter was downright insulting, and they knew it," a White House official said.

The United States had agreed to an Olympic attache for the Soviets, with access to areas that are off-limits to ordinary Soviet

diplomats. Although the Soviets were invited to propose another individual for the post after the rejection of the first, Moscow did not offer a substitute.

Beyond the issue of the attache, the Soviets apparently wanted the Administration to deny permission for any parades or other anti-Soviet demonstrations in Los Angeles and to publicly disassociate itself from the Ban the Soviets Coalition, an ad hoc organization of anti-communists, conservatives and Eastern European ethnic groups.

Moscow was told through diplomatic channels "that we had nothing to do with the coalition and did not support it," one State Department official said.

As for anti-Soviet demonstrations, "This is a free country and we can't gag people," department spokesman John Hughes said. "We are convinced we've gone that last mile to counter Soviet objections, ease Soviet concerns, answer Soviet questions. Our conscience is very clear that we have done everything to facilitate the participation of the Soviets."